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Sustainable development

Oil slick on Lebanese shores

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 68/206, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of the resolution at its sixty-ninth session under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

It provides an update in terms of progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201 and 68/206 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/52/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/278, A/66/297, A/67/341 and A/68/544).

The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme, in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 68/206, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of the resolution at its sixty-ninth session under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

2. It provides an update in terms of progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201 and 68/206 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/278, A/66/297, A/67/341 and A/68/544).

3. The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), building on the work undertaken by an inter-agency team[1] established for the previous reports. It provides a brief summary of the information presented in the above-mentioned reports of the Secretary-General on the subject and updates thereto. In particular, it presents the efforts thus far by the United Nations bodies to undertake, within existing resources, a further study to measure and quantify the environmental damage sustained by Lebanon and by neighbouring countries, as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of its resolution 68/206.

II. A brief overview of recent developments

4. The marine oil spill, which was caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks at the Jiyeh electric power plant by the Israeli Air Force, resulted in the release of about 15,000 tons of fuel oil into the Mediterranean Sea, leading to the contamination of about 150 km of coastline in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, causing adverse impacts on the environment and the achievement of sustainable development, as referred to by the General Assembly in its resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201 and 68/206.

5. Several United Nations agencies and other international, regional and national entities, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Bank and the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon, were involved in assessing the implications of the oil spill for human health, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism in Lebanon at the time of and in the immediate aftermath of the spill. A summary of their combined findings was presented to the General Assembly in the reports of the Secretary-General noted above. During the past year, UNDP commissioned a study with a view to measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by Lebanon (see sect. III below).

[1] The inter-agency team established in 2006 comprised the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Bank. The International Union for Conservation of Nature was also a key partner in this work.

6. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 68/206, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Government of Israel to assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon and other countries directly affected by the oil slick, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, whose shores have been partially polluted, for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment, in particular in the light of the conclusion contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/67/341) that there remains grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly on the subject vis-à-vis reparations and compensation to the Government and people of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic affected by the oil spill. This echoes and emphasizes previous Assembly requests. To date, however, the Government of Israel has not assumed responsibility for the relevant compensation.

7. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to urge United Nations bodies and agencies and other relevant organizations involved in the initial assessment of the relevant environmental damage to undertake, within existing resources, a further study, building on the initial work of the World Bank presented through the report of the Secretary-General to the sixty-second session of the General Assembly (A/62/343), with a view to measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by Lebanon and by neighbouring countries. The progress in this regard is outlined in section III below.

8. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its appreciation for the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and those of Member States, regional and international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the initiation of clean-up and rehabilitation operations, and encouraged continued support to the Government of Lebanon in that regard as the work was still ongoing. A project is currently under development by the Government of Lebanon for funding by the European Union that will include a component on the sound management of recovered wastes.

9. In paragraph 7 of the resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the agreement of the Lebanon Recovery Fund to host the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund and, in paragraph 8, noted that the Secretary-General had urged Member States, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector, among others, to make voluntary financial contributions to the Trust Fund, since Lebanon was still engaged in the treatment of wastes and the monitoring of recovery. It requested the Secretary-General to mobilize international technical and financial assistance in order to ensure that the Trust Fund had sufficient and adequate resources. To date, no contributions have been made to the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.

III. Actions taken to measure and quantify the relevant environmental damage

10. Pursuant to paragraph 5 of the resolution, and in response to the Secretary-General's request, UNDP in Lebanon commissioned a further study with a view to

measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by Lebanon. The study[2] reached the following conclusions:

- The previous studies undertaken by international and national agencies (referred to in paragraph 5 of the present report) constitute a solid basis for the measurement and quantification of the environmental damage caused to Lebanon by the oil spill.
- The World Bank, in a 2007 study,[3] conservatively estimated the overall damage and clean-up cost due to the oil spill at about $203 million (a lower bound of $166.3 million and an upper bound of $239.9 million). The method of calculation and the basis for arriving at this figure are in line with Lebanese and international law.
- The World Bank figure did not include the passive use value of the coastal resource, which is usually added to the direct and indirect damage values. This amounted to $217.9 million in 2006.
- After adjustment for inflation and lost opportunity in terms of interest that should have accrued until mid-2014, the oil spill damages and passive use value amounted to $856.4 million, $448.8 million for the direct and indirect damages from the oil spill and $407.6 million for the passive use value.

IV. Conclusions

11. The Secretary-General wishes to commend the ongoing efforts of the Government of Lebanon to address the impacts of the oil spill. There remains grave concern, however, at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly on this subject vis-à-vis compensation by the Government of Israel to the Government and people of Lebanon and to other countries affected by the oil spill, such as the Syrian Arab Republic. This is particularly important as studies show that the value of the damage to Lebanon amounted to $856.4 million in 2014.

12. The Secretary-General wishes to commend the commitment of the international donor community in the past to provide financial and other support. Given the circumstances of the Lebanese oil spill at the time of the incident and beyond, the Secretary-General would urge Member States, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to continue their support for Lebanon in this matter, particularly for rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast and in the broader recovery efforts. This international effort should be intensified, as Lebanon is still engaged in the treatment of wastes and the monitoring of recovery. States and the international donor community are encouraged to make contributions to the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.

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[2] See www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/operations/projects/environment_and_energy/institutional-support-to-the-ministry-of-environment.html.

[3] *Republic of Lebanon: Economic Assessment of Environmental Degradation Due to July 2006 Hostilities, report No. 39787-LB.*